

Abstract 418

TITLE: Latina Leaders as Equal Partners in Health

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ISSUE: Mobilizing the Latina community around HIV prevention efforts requires the support and involvement of community Latina leaders in all walks of life. Oftentimes mainstream approaches do not work. Therefore other types of strategies need to be explored and designed. In developing a prevention program that was community-relevant, the Teatro AIDS Prevention Project for Latinas provided the catalyst for networks of Latinas to become involved in HIV prevention.

SETTING: Theatrical presentations were performed in various locations in the community, e.g., at high schools, ESL and job training programs, churches, colleges and other centers of community life where young Latinas congregate including community forums, professional meetings and conferences.

PROJECT: TAPP for Latinas was designed to be executed at the local level. The core theater program was supported by proven peer education approaches. The story line and vignettes were developed by and for Latinas. The formation of a coordinating committee to assist with outreach activities; focus groups, field testing via a "Community Premiere" event; and building community partnerships and collaborations to maintain ongoing HIV prevention efforts in their community were the key to community involvement and empowerment.

RESULTS: Participants engaged in dialogue about concrete strategies and prevention programs that work, like the TAPP for Latinas project. The process enabled and encouraged Latinas to actively respond to HIV prevention initiatives in their community. They identified mechanisms for strengthening, supporting, and involving network of Latina leaders together with public/private sectors in recommending approaches to appropriate agencies and health officials to improve outreach and access.

LESSONS LEARNED: The expectation that local communities will have a "buy-in," or sense of ownership, is one of the major purposes of TAPP for Latinas. Where funding was available for mobilization at the local level there was increased activity to continue the work of building community partnerships among networks of Latinas. Empowerment activities were based on "do-able" action items that were time-limited in scope. Governmental and foundation funders need to start funding empowerment-based capacity-building prevention efforts that give communities a "buy-in" in becoming effective partners in health.

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